



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI, VICE CHAIR
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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW
DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 1, 2004** in room 743 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Joyce Fahey
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Helen Kleinberg
Christina S. Mattingly
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Brenda Galloway
Daisy Ma

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the March 1, 2004 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the February 9, 2004 general meeting were unanimously approved.
The minutes for the February 9, 2004 chair's meeting were unanimously approved.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Dr. Sanders stated that the IVE Waiver (Waiver) request has been approved by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and has been submitted to the state. The Department is working with the state on the fiscal information as well as information characterizing the child and family population being served by the Department. The Waiver request must then be approved by the state's Department of Finance and Social Services before being submitted to the federal government. He indicated that the federal government can only approve ten Waiver requests, yet has received 12 requests to date. Dr. Sanders is not discouraged by this as he has been in contact with those overseeing this process. He further explained that TANF has been approved by the House of Representatives and is awaiting approval by the Senate. TANF includes continued authorization for Waiver requests. If approved, the Waiver will go into effect in October 2004.

Dr. Sanders indicated that the Department's budget scenario has improved and suggested that a detailed presentation come before the Commission.

Commissioner Hurewitz asked if the funds generated from the Waiver can be used to stabilize children in relative placement. Dr. Sanders responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Kleinberg asked whether the Department was still aiming for SPA realignment to be completed by April 1, 2004. Dr. Sanders responded in the affirmative.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Dana Blackwell reported on her attendance at the California Youth Permanency Project Child Welfare/Adoption and Foster Family Agencies Partnership Workgroup on February 27, 2004. The work group will meet six times over the next 2 years to impact and influence public policy and administrative practice. The workgroup will concentrate its efforts on 1) public and private partnerships, 2) fiscal incentives, 3) training and 4) disseminating the definition and importance of permanence.
- Ms. Blackwell reported that planning for Foster Care Awareness Week is underway. It will take place the week of May 9th. Efforts to engage the faith based community, the media, hospitals and others to engage the community in bringing about a positive image of foster youth and parenting our children.
- Chair Williams complimented the chairs of the three workgroups working on the Children's Planning Council motion. She is encouraged by these efforts.
- Chair Williams announced that a Chair's meeting is scheduled for March 15th prior to the general meeting of the Commission. The agenda items will include 1) the Commission's and Department's 20th anniversary, 2) term of the chairs, and three necessary By-law changes.
- Chair Williams reported that Dr. Sanders was the Merit Award recipient at the LA County African American Heritage celebration.
- Chair Williams reported that she has asked Vice Chair Biondi to bring a probation report/presentation to the Commission in the near future. Additionally, she has asked Commissioner Hurewitz to work with the Adoption Committee to develop

achievement milestones in order for the Commission to track the activities in the Department's adoption division.

- Chair Williams circulated a letter she received from Dr. Salimpour thanking the Commission for the opportunity make a presentation on First 5 LA Connect.
- Commissioner Curry announced that the Student Aid Commission has several million dollars available to emancipated foster youth for vocational training and tuition for education that could include room and board. The funds are being administered state wide. There is an effort to inform the youth. The information is posted on the emancipation website: www.ilponline.org. She encouraged people to spread the word.

Commissioner Kleinberg expressed the need to reevaluate how funds such as these are distributed. It is her experience that often times the funds that are available to youth do not reach them. Chair Williams commented that a recent newspaper article addressed the denial of 1500 applications for Section 8. It is her feeling that there are those in that pool of applications that are emancipated youth. Chair Williams asked Helen Berberian to put forth the information about these funds to the Section 8 office so they too can join in the effort of informing youth.

Commissioner Hurewitz commented on First 5 LA Connect's Safe Sleeping initiative which informs families about the dangers of sleeping with their infants. They have acquired a grant to purchase bassinets for families with infants.

Commissioner Curry requested a report to the Commission on Metropolitan State Hospital.

WORKGROUP REPORT – Family Reunification

Commissioner Kleinberg explained that the presentation is to provide the Commission with an update on the progress of their efforts and that these efforts focus on the examination of how the Department and all of its community stakeholders and providers work with families to promote positive family reunification outcomes. Russ Carr, Deputy Director, stated that the workgroup's goal is to address system changes needed to promote safe and timely family reunification. The states Program Improvement Plan (PIP) has set the national standard at 76.2% of children in the child welfare system are to be reunified with their families within 12 months after detention. In Los Angeles County, 24 months is the average length of time in which family reunification is achieved. Mr. Carr referenced the BOS approved motion related to family reunification. In addition to this charge, the workgroup also needs to address a system change for the 7,000 families currently receiving reunification services.

Commissioner Kleinberg explained that the workgroup is approaching this issue in two stages. First, the workgroup is engaging stakeholders (court, parents, youth, SPA councils, foster parents, etc.) to understand all of the barriers that exist toward family reunification. The work group members met with the Department's executive team and it was determined that a series of focus groups would take place at existing community

forums. Predetermined questions have been formulated and will be asked at each focus group. Note takers will provide the work group with the responses from each of the focus groups. To date, Commissioner Sorkin has completed the facilitation of one parent focus group.

Commissioner Kleinberg acknowledged the efforts of other community stakeholders, such as the New Directions Task Force, on the issue of family reunification. She stated that once the information from the focus groups is collected, all of the community stakeholders set forth in the motion will be invited to participate and contribute to their work. Currently the workgroup members include the Commission, DCFS, Mental Health and County Counsel.

Commissioner Kleinberg, along with Commissioners Sorkin and Fahey and Deputy Directors Russ Carr and John Oppenheim provided the Commission with a brief explanation of the family reunification issues identified by the workgroup. Those issues are as follows:

- The necessity for culture change within the Department to focus on the way in which CSWs work with families.
- Shared decision making and responsibility for outcomes both within the county system and in the larger community network.
- The importance of mental health providers as key partners in supporting families.
- Effective utilization of existing programs, resources and initiatives.
- Determining whether standards are too high for safe reunification and whether there should be an agreed upon description as to what the Department considers a safe family environment
- The importance of the initial detention hearing, follow-up investigations within 72 hours before the initial detention hearing and the information provided to the court at that time.
- Better understanding and augmentation of reunification outcomes within the current data collection system.
- The utilization of multidisciplinary team decision making that includes the family in the case planning to better understand the family's needs and the resources available to them.
- Implementation of a different plan for children age 0-6 in order to better address their developmental needs as they are more vulnerable than older children.
- The need to ensure and strengthen family visitation as well as sibling visitation in the event that placing the children together is impossible or not in the best interest of the children. Commissioner Sorkin cited WIC sections 362.1 and 16002.
- Work with the school districts to assist and promote family reunification.
- The importance of training for staff and stakeholders to promote successful reunification and develop the appropriate networks of community agencies to support safe reunification.
- The examination of the intake of new cases to ensure that the detention of children is standardized across offices

Commissioner Curry asked the status of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and how it is being utilized within this paradigm. Mr. Carr acknowledged the importance of FGDM and stated that it is intended to be used at the front-end of the system and is included in the resources to be provided to those families in the reunification process. Dr. Sanders stated that some discussion has taken place about the facilitation aspect of the model and whether it is necessary to have it in place before a team is utilized. He further commented on the specialization of FGDM and whether it is retained as a specialized program.

Commissioner Hurewitz suggested the workgroup explore the utilization of mediation prior to the initial detention hearing. He further suggested that there needs to be further investigation into the 7,000 family reunification cases as it may lend insight into some of the barriers. Dr. Sanders stated that there a 10,000 permanent placement cases that should also be examined as they are conceivably family reunification cases. He also noted that the cases under the Belvedere, Metro North and North Hollywood offices have shorter lengths of time in care as compared to the remainder of the Department and suggested that the workgroup understand the practices that make that possible.

Vice Chair Biondi asked the workgroup if it is looking at the possibility of implementing a safety net for a child when family reunification is not in his/her best interest. Commissioner Sorkin encouraged the utilization of Structured Decision Making as it assesses each case over time. Commissioner Fahey suggested that such area of concern will be addressed in the discussion about shared decision making and responsibility for outcomes as it is important to develop a partnership and a team approach toward successful family reunification.

Vice Chair Rudnick commented on the overlap of issues between efforts of family reunification and prevention workgroups and suggested that these efforts be combined.

Commissioner McClaney commented on the importance of sibling contact and suggested that sensitivity training be provided to CSWs and court personnel. Commissioner Fahey commented on the difficulty of finding homes able to accommodate sibling groups. Commissioner McClaney suggested that favoritism takes place on the part of CSWs with respect to care providers at the expense of what's in the best interest of youth. Chair Williams suggested that the Department recruit care providers that meet this need.

Trinity Wallace-Ellis, Youth Representative, asked the work group to be mindful to ensure the provision of service to parents who ultimately need supports to ensure that reunification can take place, especially at the outset of detention. Additionally, she commented on the importance of sibling contact.

OLD BUSINESS

Paramount Family Conferencing Center (FCC): Mr. Carr stated that the FCC will provide supervision and a comfortable therapeutic setting for children when they are

removed from their homes while CSWs are looking for the most appropriate care facility. It will also accommodate a space to conduct multidisciplinary assessments.

Germaine Key, Regional Administrator, indicated that the FCC is close to being opened and staff are currently being interviewed. She reemphasized that the primary purpose of the FCC is to provide a comfortable setting while placement options are being explored. The program offers services to children from the age of seven to 17 with the exception of sibling groups. The FCC can only accommodate nine youth at any given time for a maximum of 23 hours. Services provided at the facility include crisis intervention, stabilization, a safe and comfortable environment for napping, and multidisciplinary assessments.

Commissioner Fahey asked if the FCC can accommodate parental or sibling visits and what the language capabilities of staff will be. Ms. Key stated that visitation can take place during the 23 hours. With respect to language, Ms. Key indicated that interviews have included staff who are Spanish speaking and they are looking to provide the capability of alternative languages.

Commissioner Curry expressed her concern about the difficulty of finding the appropriate placement within 23 hours and the ability to also complete a multidisciplinary assessment in that time frame. She asked for further clarification about the criteria for which youth are appropriate for the FCC vs. an emergency foster home. She expressed further concern with respect to the county budget situation and the potential for duplication of services between the FCC and the HUBs being created by Dr. Sophy. Chair Williams stated that due to time restraints, these questions could be answered at another time in the near future when the presenters were available to return.

Commissioner Hurewitz asked whether protocol has been established to facilitate a family conference within 23 hours. Ms. Key responded that if a conference can be put together in that time frame it will take place. She emphasized that the FCC's main goal is to offer a more comfortable environment while an emergency placement is being secured.

Commissioner Sorkin stated when the Department was in the beginning phases of developing the FCC, it was indicated that the FCC would be a multipurpose center that would accommodate FGDM conferences. She asked if that continues to be part of the plan. Mr. Carr commented that the facility has the capability to accommodate such a conference.

Mr. Carr and Ms. Key agreed to come back in the future.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Loyce Butler first commented that her daughter never received emancipation funds and was not provided ILP services. Ms. Butler faulted the ILP coordinator and the CSW for non-receipt of these funds. Secondly she commented on the difficulty of adopting the three siblings in her home for whom TPR has taken place. She

expressed her concern with the level of authority CSWs have. Finally she thanked Commissioners Curry and Kleinberg for the assistance they provided her with respect to transportation to school for the youth in her home.

- Yvonne Michelle Autry questioned the purpose of the Department and whether the Department is providing appropriate family reunification services.

MEETING ADJOURNED